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SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - IRAQ - FRENCH HOSTAGE -
VIDEOTAPE MIDDLE EAST - LEBANON - SYRIA - GREATER MIDDLE EAST
U.S. - EU AND THE TRANSATLANTIC ALLIANCE
PARIS - WEDNESDAY, MARCH 02, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

- [1](#)1. IRAQ - FRENCH HOSTAGE - VIDEOTAPE
- [1](#)2. MIDDLE EAST - LEBANON - SYRIA - GREATER MIDDLE EAST
- [1](#)3. U.S. - EU AND THE TRANSATLANTIC ALLIANCE

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

TODAY'S FRONT PAGES ARE OVERWHELMINGLY DEVOTED TO FLORENCE AUBENAS, THE FRENCH LIBERATION JOURNALIST HELD HOSTAGE IN IRAQ. YESTERDAY, THE VIDEOTAPE SHOWN TO THE PUBLIC WAS THE FIRST INDICATION THAT THE KIDNAPPED JOURNALIST WAS ALIVE.

A NUMBER OF EDITORIALS COMMENT ON THE MESSAGE READ BY AUBENAS AND ON THE POSSIBILITY OF NEGOTIATIONS BY THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT. NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEMBER DIDIER JULIA, THE CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE WHO WAS INVOLVED IN THE PREVIOUS CHESNOT AND MALBRUNOT NEGOTIATIONS, IS BACK IN THE NEWS, WITH AUBENAS CITING HIM IN HER MESSAGE. (SEE PART C) POPULAR RIGHT-OF-CENTER FRANCE SOIR CARRIES A SPECIAL 5-PAGE REPORT BY THOMAS DE ROCHECHOUART FROM AMMAN, IN WHICH THE CORRESPONDENT EXPLAINS HOW THE VIDEOTAPE WAS FIRST OFFERED TO FRANCE SOIR BY THE ISLAMIC ARMY, WHICH CLAIMS TO BE HOLDING AUBENAS, BEFORE BEING GIVEN TO AL-JAZIRA. FRANCE SOIR WAS ULTIMATELY ONLY GIVEN A COMMUNIQUE WHICH IS REPRODUCED IN TRANSLATION:
".CONTRARY TO WHAT THE MEDIA REPORTED AT THE TIME OF THE CHESNOT AND MALBRUNOT LIBERATION, IT WAS NOT FM BARNIER'S INTERVENTION, OR THAT OF THE AMERICANS. WHICH BROUGHT ABOUT THEIR LIBERATION. IT WAS JULIA'S INITIATIVE. WE REITERATE OUR REQUEST TO FRANCE TO STAY AWAY FROM IRAQ, BECAUSE THE SITUATION DOES NOT WARRANT IT."

TWO COLUMNS, IN LE FIGARO AND LES ECHOS, EMPHASIZE THE ROLE OF "A DEMOCRATIC AWAKENING" IN THE MIDDLE EAST AS PARTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR LEBANON'S "CEDAR REVOLUTION." FOR ALEXANDRE ADLER IN LE FIGARO, THE ELECTIONS IN AFGHANISTAN, THE U.S. VICTORY IN IRAQ AND EVENTS IN PALESTINE "CREATED A CHAIN REACTION IN A REGION WHERE THE STATUS QUO OF OLD REGIMES IS NO LONGER TOLERATED." FOR JACQUES HUBERT-RODIER IN LES ECHOS, "WASHINGTON MAY BE REACHING ITS GOAL IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST." (SEE PART C)

LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE CARRIES AN ANALYSIS ON THE PROPOSAL OF A EUROPEAN CAUCUS WITHIN NATO BY DANIEL VERNET TITLED "ORGANIZING THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE U.S. AND EUROPE." (SEE PART C)

THE DECISION BY THE U.S. SUPREME COURT TO BAR CAPITAL PUNISHMENT FOR MINORS IS REPORTED. RADIO COMMENTATOR DOMINIQUE BROMBERGER SAID ON FRANCE INTER THAT "THIS WAS A BREAKTHROUGH FOR DEATH PENALTY ABOLITIONISTS." REGIONAL OUEST FRANCE COMMENTED: "THOSE WHO OPPOSE THE DEATH PENALTY SCORED A GREAT VICTORY YESTERDAY IN THE UNITED STATES. IN THAT COUNTRY, WHICH REMAINS ONE OF THE LAST TO EXECUTE ITS JUVENILE CRIMINALS, THE SUPREME COURT ABOLISHED THE DEATH PENALTY FOR THOSE UNDER 18 YEARS OLD. THIS ADVANCE MADE BY THE COURT ALSO REFLECTS A GENERAL DECLINE OF THE DEATH PENALTY IN THE UNITED STATES. WHILE THE MAJORITY OF AMERICANS REMAIN FAVORABLE, DEATH SENTENCES AS WELL AS EXECUTIONS HAVE DECREASED SINCE 1999."

REPORTS ON THE LONDON PALESTINIAN AID CONFERENCE INDICATE THAT "THE PRESENCE OF SECRETARY RICE AND UN SECRETARY GENERAL KOFI ANNAN GAVE SUBSTANCE TO THE CONFERENCE." (LIBERATION.) IN LE FIGARO, PAUL CECONI REPORTS ON FM BARNIER'S PROPOSAL FOR AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, "DURING THE SECOND HALF OF 2005." HE COMMENTS: "THE PROPOSAL WAS NOT ACKNOWLEDGED BY THE U.S. BECAUSE IT CLASHES WITH WASHINGTON'S AMBITION TO CONTROL THE MIDDLE EAST AGENDA."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

IRAQ - FRENCH HOSTAGE - VIDEOTAPE
"50 SECONDS"

ANTOINE GAUDEMAR IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION (03/02): "THE HARSH AND CRUEL FIFTY SECONDS OF THE TAPE ARE AN INDICATION OF

THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH AUBENAS IS BEING HELD. FIFTY SECONDS WHICH GIVE NO PRECISE INFORMATION ON THE KIDNAPERS, OR THEIR DEMANDS. ON THE CONTRARY, THE MESSAGE COMPLICATES EVEN MORE THEIR SADISTIC SKEIN, WITH THE MENTION OF DIDIER JULIA, WHICH IS IN ITSELF AN INDICATION THAT AUBENAS'S MESSAGE WAS DICTATED TO HER BY HER KIDNAPPERS. BUT THESE 50 SECONDS ARE ALSO THE SIGN THAT A NEGOTIATION MAY HAVE BEGUN BETWEEN THE KIDNAPERS AND THE FRENCH AUTHORITIES."

MIDDLE EAST - LEBANON - SYRIA - GREATER MIDDLE EAST

"THE CEDAR REVOLUTION VERSUS 'PAX SYRIANA'"
JACQUES HUBERT-RODIER IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LES ECHOS (03/02):
"SYRIA IS TODAY IN THE EYES OF THE LEBANESE OPPOSITION, OF WASHINGTON AND PARIS, THE MAIN SUSPECT BEHIND HARIRI'S DEATH. THE FIRST ERROR OF APPRECIATION WHICH EL-ASSAD MADE WAS ABOUT THE TOPPLING OF SADDAM HUSSEIN AND THE PRESENCE OF THE COALITION TROOPS AT SYRIA'S DOOR. WASHINGTON NEVER DENIED THAT SYRIA WAS IN ITS LINE OF FIRE. AND THE OPPOSITION MOVEMENT IN BEIRUT MAY WELL BECOME THE SYMBOL OF WASHINGTON'S FINAL OBJECTIVE OF BRINGING DEMOCRACY TO THE MIDDLE EAST. ELECTIONS HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN IRAQ AND IN PALESTINE. EGYPT IS ALSO ON THE MOVE. ANOTHER NEGATIVE SIGN FOR DAMASCUS IS THE ALLIANCE BETWEEN PRESIDENTS BUSH AND CHIRAC AGAINST DAMASCUS, IN SPITE OF THEIR OPPOSITION ON IRAQ, AND EVEN IF THEIR MOTIVATIONS ARE NOT IDENTICAL. FEBRUARY 28, 2005 WILL BE REMEMBERED AS THE FIRST TIME AN ARAB REGIME HAS BEEN TOPPLED BY THE POWER OF THE STREET."

"CHAIN REACTION"
ALEXANDRE ADLER IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (03/02): "THE VICTORY BY THE LEBANESE OPPOSITION OPENS THE DOOR TO RESOLVING THE CRISIS WITH SYRIA'S REGIME. UNKNOWINGLY, THE U.S. AND IRAN FIND THEMSELVES ON THE SAME SIDE. THE LEBANESE REVOLUTION IS THE RESULT OF A CHAIN REACTION OF EVENTS, WHICH INCLUDE THE SUCCESS OF THE ELECTIONS IN AFGHANISTAN, DUE MOSTLY TO A CONVERGENCE BETWEEN U.S. AND IRANIAN POLICIES, TO IRAQ'S SHIITES AND KURDS MAKING USE OF THE DEMOCRATIC POTENTIAL OFFERED BY THE U.S. VICTORY IN IRAQ. AND TO EVENTS IN PALESTINE. THE DOUBLE INFLUENCE OF THE U.S. MILITARY THREAT AND IRAN'S PRESSURE HAS LED TO A TURNAROUND IN DAMASCUS AND SYRIA ABANDONING THE LEBANESE REGIME."

U.S. - EU AND THE TRANSATLANTIC ALLIANCE

"U.S. - EU AND THE TRANSATLANTIC ALLIANCE"
DANIEL VERNET IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LE MONDE (03/02): "THE MORE EUROPE MOVES TOWARDS INTEGRATION, THE MORE THE EU DEVELOPS ITS JOINT SECURITY AND DEFENSE POLICY, AND THE MORE IT BEGINS TO ASSUME THE BURDEN OF POLITICAL AND MILITARY TASKS, THE MORE IT SHOULD, AS A UNION, BECOME AN INTERLOCUTOR FOR THE U.S. IN OTHER WORDS THE AMERICANS WILL HAVE IN FRONT OF THEM LESS OF A MULTITUDE OF INDIVIDUAL PARTNERS AND MORE OF A STRUCTURED ENTITY. WHILE IT WILL NOT BE A RIVAL, BY SIMPLE VIRTUE OF THE DISCREPANCY IN FORCES, THE INFLUENCE THAT THE EU WILL CARRY AS A UNION WILL BE GREATER THAN THE WEIGHT OF THE SUM OF ITS MEMBERS. FOR THIS NOT TO REMAIN IN THE SPHERE OF POLITICAL FICTION, THE 25 NEED TO AGREE AMONG THEMSELVES. BUT THE TRUTH IS THAT IN MATTERS RELATING TO NATO, EUROPEAN CONSULTATIONS ARE NOTHING NEW. THE U.S. HAS ALWAYS OPPOSED THE IDEA OF A EUROPEAN CAUCUS. FOR REASONS OF EFFECTIVENESS. BUT IN REALITY IT IS EASIER FOR WASHINGTON TO CONVINCE INDIVIDUAL PARTNERS THAN MANEUVERING WITH A EUROPE, WHICH HAS REACHED CRITICAL SIZE. HENCE SCHROEDER'S RELUCTANCE TO SPEAK ABOUT A CAUCUS; INSTEAD HE FAVORS A TRANSATLANTIC FORUM. SO DOES FRANCE. WILL THE AMERICANS LISTEN? FOR THE TIME BEING THEY ARE IGNORING THE ISSUE. THEY SEE NO REASON TO CHANGE STRUCTURES THEY CAN USE OR IGNORE AS THEY PLEASE. THE REAL TRANSATLANTIC PARTNERSHIP IS STILL AT THE BEGINNING STAGES." LEACH